

News From U.S. Senator

North Dakota

Byron L. Dorgan

U.S. Senate " 713 Hart Building " Washington D.C. 20510

E-mail: senator@dorgan.senate.gov " Internet Web Page: <http://dorgan.senate.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Dana McCallum

Thursday

June 1, 2000

PHONE: 202-224-2551

DORGAN, NORTH DAKOTA SENIORS PUSH FOR ACTION ON PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT FOR MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) — U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan and groups representing North Dakota Medicare beneficiaries called on Congress Thursday to add a prescription drug benefit to the Medicare program. During a Fargo news conference, Dorgan and others from the Fargo area said that now is the time to bring an affordable prescription drug benefit to the 93,000 North Dakota senior citizens and 10,000 disabled citizens who would benefit from such a Medicare program.

"We have proposed a voluntary, affordable prescription drug benefit for Medicare that will help the senior citizens who need to take lifesaving drugs, but who now can't afford them," said Dorgan. "We're asking the majority party in Congress to put that legislation on the agenda and pass it this year."

Dorgan said that spending last year on prescription drugs increased by 16 percent. "While some of that is from price increases and increased utilization, the fact remains that there are too many senior citizens on a fixed income who cannot afford the medicine they need."

The majority party has proposed a piece of legislation that calls on the private insurance companies to provide prescription drug benefits. But, Dorgan said, the insurance companies have already said that they wouldn't be able to provide the policies, and if they did, they wouldn't be affordable, "so the Majority's plan is another hollow vessel."

"When seniors reach their declining income years, they have an increasing need for prescription drugs and often cannot afford to pay the steep costs of those medicines," Dorgan added. "It's time for Congress to take action now to extend the prescription drug benefits of the Medicare program."

— END —